Heart of Cinder

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Cinder Fall may be a criminal...But criminals have hearts too. Cinder develops a softer side after she begins to care for a young Harry Potter, whom she rescued from his abusive relatives. Will Cinder be able to prioritize a child over her work? Can Harry deal with having a criminal for a mother? Will Stevie ever stop leaving banana peels lying around for Cinder to slip on?

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Chapter 1

18 year old Cinder Fall was a newcomer in the criminal industry. At the time, her motives for joining the industry were unknown...But she was working her way up. She had started out doing petty theft, vandalism and whatnot...but she was very good at it, and eventually upgraded to becoming a henchman for one of the big league villains. That lasted about two months before she moved on to do her own thing.

The downside to being new in the criminal world? Good help was INCREDIBLY difficult to come across these days... Sure, Emerald and Mercury were quite helpful...But everyone else...

"Hey, you see how short Cinder's dress is?"

"Yeah, it's pretty sexy, I gotta say."

"I think I'm gonna try to sneak a peek later on..."

All three men froze as they felt an intense heat, and they turned to see Cinder looking at them with an unamused expression in her eyes.

"You three would be wise to not say such inappropriate things about me behind my back." She said, an eerie aura of calmness in her voice causing the three men to shiver despite the boiling air around them.

"I-we...I mean-"

"Enough." Cinder calmly held a ball of fire inches from the henchman's face, causing him to sweat. "Need I remind you what happens when you get on my bad side?" The men paled as they remembered the one unfortunate bastard who had the balls to try and actually flirt with Cinder face to face. She WAS kind enough to give him several warnings, but he didn't listen and...It was a miracle

that the medics she had hired were able to prevent permanent scars...

Content that she had made her point, Cinder smirked, then turned and began to saunter off...then let out a yelp as she felt herself step on something slippery, causing her to slip forward and fall facefirst on the floor, her butt sticking up in the air, giving all three henchmen a perfect view of her assets, which caused them to nosebleed and fall unconscious. Cinder snarled at the indignity of her current position, then pulled herself to her feet and glared at a rather chubby man eating a banana.

"Stevie...HOW many times must I tell you NOT to leave banana peels lying around?!"

"Sorry, Boss!" Stevie said in an incredibly grating high pitched, nasally voice. "I forgot!"

"Yes, that seems to be a recurring theme around here..." Cinder muttered. She was often tempted to burn Stevie...but she had standards. She wasn't about to disfigure a man who was clearly mentally challenged. The young woman shook her head in aggravation. Between Stevie's idiocy, the constant misfortunes she suffered due to tossed banana peels, and 99.9 percent of her henchmen making innappropriate comments about her behind her back...She desperately needed some air... "Stevie. I'm going out. Tell Emerald that she's in charge while I'm gone, if you're capable of handling that." Really, Cinder couldn't care less what her minions did while she was out. What's the worst that could happen? Stevie saluted.

"Okay! I'll go tell her, and maybe even finally get her out on a super cool date!" Cinder rolled her eyes at her henchman's hopeless advances on one of two useful henchmen she had, then walked out the door into the late, cloudy evening.

The raven-haired young woman sighed in relief as she vaguely felt the cool night air flow through her hair. Due to her fire semblance,

her body heat was extraordinarily high, so she didn't have to worry about something as trivial as being cold. She enjoyed her walk through the city...It gave her time to unwind and think about ways to properly deal with her henchmen that don't involve straight-up murder...

Eventually, her walk lead her to a small block called Number Four Privet Drive. Her brow raised in slight surprise. She hadn't meant to go quite so far...It appeared she had been too lost in her thoughts...She supposed there were worse neighbourhoods she could have ended up in, though...Still, couldn't hurt to keep an eye out for any...less than desirable pursuers.

Keeping her senses alert allowed the young woman to hear something from a nearby house... Something that sounded suspiciously like a man yelling...And then she heard a weak-sounding scream of agony cut through the night air. The criminal narrowed her eyes, then approached the house and took a peek through the window. She saw a large man standing over something, bringing what appeared to be a whip down onto it, occasionally stopping to kick it or stomp on it. From what little she could see of the figure, she knew that it was human. Cinder may have been a criminal, but sometimes criminals have standards too. She wasn't one who condoned going around violently beating the weak and defenceless for no reason. So, she decided to take action. She approached the door, and with a quick snap of her fingers, it exploded in an eruption of flames, allowing her to calmly stroll into the house.

Vernon stopped his violent acts towards his young nephew as the sound of his door exploding reached his ears.

"Damn..." He cursed, reaching down and picking Harry "James" Potter up. "Into the cupboard with you, freak." As fast as he could, the obese man threw the cupboard open and roughly tossed his nephew into the backwall, smirking as the little boy slammed into the wall and collapsed facefirst to the dusty wooden floor. The large man

slammed the cupboard door shut as hard as he could and sighed in relief...

"Why hello there." Vernon whipped his head around at the sound of a silky smooth, almost seductive feminine voice. His eyes widened as he saw an attractive young woman with raven-coloured hair that obscured one of her piercing yellow eyes, wearing a short, red dress and black high-heels.

"Wh-What are you doing here?! Get out of my house!" The walrus-like man warned. Cinder smirked, and sauntered up to him with a sway in her hips. She cupped his chin in between her fingers and gave him a seductive smirk.

"Oh, don't worry. I'll be on my way shortly. I just have a few...things I need to take care of." Vernon felt himself blushing, but then he shook it off and glared angrily.

"I DEMAND THAT YOU LEAVE RIGHT THIS INSTA-" He never got to finish that sentence, as he suddenly found himself on the receiving end of a powerful kick to the stomach that launched him right into the wall on the other side of the room with a sickening crunch. Vernon roared in agony as he felt the sensation of broken bones. Cinder was not done. She firmly dug one of her heels into Vernon's ribs and twisted so that her high-heels would dig into the man's skin.

"You know, fat boy..." She said, never losing the absolute calmness in her tone. "I may not be on the right side of the law...But even I have to draw the line somewhere. And I'm pretty sure I saw you hitting a child with a whip. That is where I draw the line." Vernon's only response was a pained yell. Cinder rolled her eyes and kicked his ribs to shut him up. "Don't try to deny it, either. I saw the whole thing. And I know just the way to..." Cinder created a large fireball in her hand. "...Punish you." Vernon's eyes widened in horror, and he tried to crawl away...but it was too late. Cinder had already kneeled down and calmly placed the flames on the obese man's leg. Vernon howled in agony as the fire travelled up his body. Cinder stood, and

smirked as she watched the obese man write in agony. "I don't regret that for one moment." She said calmly as she brushed her hand against her dress to clear the soot. With that, the young woman approached the cupboard, having seen Vernon stuff something in there moments before she had come in.

Cinder had seen some terrible things in her life...Murder...Grievous injuries...It never truly phased her...but that was likely because it was all happening to adults. However, the sight that awaited her when she opened the cupboard would have made her sympathize with the victim if they were an adult...but it was made all the more worse because the victim in this case was an innocent child, no older than four or five from the looks of it. He was curled up in a trembling ball, practically naked except for an overly large pair of boxers...And this allowed the criminal to see every inch of his mutilated back.

He was cut. He was bleeding. He was bruised. There were burn marks and blistered skin all over his body. Scars were everywhere, most of which would be very difficult to get rid of. There was some raw flesh, and even the slightest hint of muscle exposed. His left arm was twisted at an incredibly awkward angle, and she could practically see the bone poking through. He looked like he hadn't seen a decent meal in years. Tentatively, she reached out to place a hand on his hand...The moment she did so, his head snapped over to her, and her eyes widened in shock at the condition his face was in. His eyes were practically swollen shut. His lip was cut right open, leaking blood into his mouth. A few large patches of skin were burned raw.

Cinder was stunned by just how horrified she was at seeing a child in such a miserable condition. Immediately, she regretted not making Vernon suffer much longer than she had...

Harry took one look at Cinder, and he whimpered and retreated further into the cupboard. Cinder actually found herself tearing up...before coming to her senses. Scowling, Cinder wiped the tear away. This was not the time to start crying...This boy urgently

needed medical attention...Without missing a beat, she reached into the cupboard and snatched the child up into her arms.

Harry weakly struggled to escape the strange woman's arms, but to no avail. He was far too injured to even come close to freedom...

Then the woman spoke.

"Relax." Harry stopped struggling, and shakily looked up through his blurred vision. "I'm not going to hurt you. If I wanted to, I would have done it already." Harry still trembled.

Cinder felt rather...moved by this child. She felt something stir inside her, an immense warmth in her chest that had nothing to do with her powers...She felt herself overcome by a powerful desire to protect this child, to make sure he felt safe, and to make sure no one ever hurt him.

Cinder found herself blushing at these emotions...but she didn't know why. She just found this child, he didn't mean anything to her!

Still...

Cinder looked down as the child finally lost consciousness in her arms, the steady rise and fall of his chest being a clear sign he was still alive. She knew that he needed medical attention...but she didn't feel comfortable going to a hospital...She hadn't been caught in the act of a crime yet...but she was a little paranoid.

She supposed her own medics would have to do...

"Vernon! I heard screaming, is everything-" Cinder turned to see a horse-faced woman and a baby whale run into the room. They stared at the charred husk that was once Vernon Dursley, then turned to the woman who was now holding the wizard.

Petunia was too terrified to even scream. Dudley was confused. What was going on?

Cinder gave them a glare. Petunia grabbed Dudley and ran out of the room. Cinder smirked and turned to walk away...but then heard the sound of a clicking gun. Raising a brow, she turned and saw the horse-faced woman shakily pointing a shotgun at her.

"...You're joking. You're joking, right?" She asked, bemused by the primitive weapon. Vale was known for creating so much unique weapons, and here this humanoid barn animal was pointing a plain old shotgun in her face. Then, Cinder learned that horses could speak.

"Now listen here, you...you..." Cinder adjusted her hold on Harry so she was only holding him in one arm, then used the other to grab hold of the gun and effortlessly tear it out of Petunia's grasp. The horse-face woman looked down at her now weapon-less hands, then at Cinder.

"Well? Please go on. I'm curious...what am I?" Petunia's only response was a terrified whimper, eliciting a smirk from Cinder. "That's what I thought. Tell me...Did you ever want to know what a horse looks like after it's been burned?" Petunia was rooted to the spot in fear. Then, she screeched like a banshee as she felt a wave of immense heat wash over her face, and staggered back as her face was further disfigured. "Just look in a mirror." And with that, Cinder turned to leave, leaving Petunia to stick her head in the sink to put the flames out.

Cinder stepped back out into the cold night air. While it didn't bother her in the slightest, Harry was visibly shaking due to the chilly air. Something compelled her to try to warm him up...So she held him close against her chest, allowing her body heat to do the work. Almost immediately, the unconscious little boy stopped shaking, and subconsciously snuggled closer to her.

Cinder scowled in aggravation when she felt a sudden urge to kiss the top of the boy's head. Shaking her head with a sigh, she looked down at him, considering what to do with him.

She decided...Her medics were highly trained, and very effective at their jobs. They would likely be able to heal over most of these injuries no problem. So, her goal in mind, Cinder began the walk back to her hideout. The boy would be healed if it killed her...

Chapter 2

Cinder calmly strolled into the medical center in her base, the child still knocked out in her arms. The two medics turned towards her, not expecting to see her carrying a small child in her arms. The two men stared at her in surprise. She gave them a stoic look, then held Harry out towards them.

"Take care of this one's injuries." She commanded.

"M-Ma'am, where'd you get this kid?" One of the medics asked. His response came in the form of a ball of fire being held inches away from his cheek.

"Do I pay you to question me?"Cinder asked menacingly.

"N-No..."

"That's right. Now get to work." Cinder turned and left the room, wanting to think about what to do with the kid.

A few hours later, Cinder was sitting in her easy chair, absentmindedly messing around with her fire powers. She was deep in thought... So now that the kid was here...What would she do with him? She inwardly scowled at the thought of just dumping him off at an orphanage or on someone's doorstep... But maybe...Maybe she could train him into an effective minion...? Cinder shook her head, disturbed with herself for even considering the notion of using a child to accomplish her evil plans... She just didn't know what to do with him...

Suddenly, there was frantic knocking on the other side of her door, jolting her from her train of thought.

"Enter." She called out calmly. In stepped one of her henchmen.

"Um...ma'am, the kid you brought's awake now..."

"Very good. How is he doing?"

"...He's freaking the hell out, ma'am. We thought you might be able to quiet him down a bit..."

Cinder frowned. What could he possibly be afraid of?

"...I'm coming down right now." She said as she rose to her feet. The minion nodded and left, and the young woman walked down the hall at a brisk pace.

Beforehand...

Harry's eyes gradually opened, and he blinked to clear his blurred vision. Something felt...off... His cupboard wasn't as hard and cold as it usually was...and the agonizing pain that usually racked his body was significantly dimmed. Groggily, the little boy forced himself to sit...and his eyes widened in horror as he realized that he wasn't in his cupboard at all. But that had to mean... Oh no...He had been seen! Uncle Vernon had warned him what would happen if anyone saw him! Harry's head snapped to the side when he heard the door open. A man in a doctor's outfit stepped in.

"Excellent! You're awake! So, how are we feeling today?" Harry scooted back against the bed and hugged his knees to make himself appear as small as possible. The man frowned and moved to approach. Harry screamed, and ended up falling off the bed, eliciting a wince from the stranger in front of him. The doctor tried to approach again, but Harry began to scoot back desperately, not wanting to suffer Vernon's wrath should the large man see him with a normal human besides himself and his family... "Relax, kid, I'm not gonna hurt you." The man got entirely too close for the little boy's liking, and he began to hyperventilate. The man frowned, and turned to a minion who had come in to see what all the fuss was about. "...Get Cinder. She might know what to do." The minion nodded and ran off.

Present Time...

Cinder made it to the medical wing, and calmly opened the door. The medic ran up to her.

"Miss Cinder! Thank God! Please calm this kid down, he's terrified!" Cinder sighed.

"Did you do anything that may have caused him to get like this?" She asked. The medic shook his head. "All right, I'll take care of it." And with that, she began to walk towards Harry.

Harry looked up at the woman approaching him. She looked familiar...Then he remembered...She had been holding him earlier...It had felt rather nice... But what if it was all just an act? Harry didn't want to take chances. He flattened himself against the wall, unable to calm his frantic breathing.

Cinder frowned and stopped mere feet away from the child. She wasn't exactly the most ideal person to console a scared child, but then again, nobody else in the building was either. She racked her brain for ideas on how to try to calm him down, then put on the most pleasant smile she could muster up.

"...Hello there." Harry flinched when she spoke. "...Will you please relax? We're just trying to help you." The child looked up at her, but did not stop his rapid, heavy breathing. Cinder scowled in frustration. If he wanted to freak out for no reason, that was just fine with her. She was about to turn to leave...but then her expression softened when she got a good look in the child's eyes, and she immediately felt a twinge of guilt for losing patience so quickly. What she saw was the expression of a broken little boy who desperately needed some form of comfort. She had no idea what compelled her to do it...but she slowly approached the scared child, ignoring the fact that he was backed against the wall. She kneeled down to his level. And she wrapped her arms around his little shoulders and pulled his head onto her chest in an awkward, but comfortable hug.

Harry's eyes widened, and his hyperventilating finally ceased. He looked up at the woman holding him. She looked just as surprised as

he felt...

Cinder stared ahead blankly with wide eyes after she had hugged the child. What, WHAT had compelled her to do such a thing? She was supposed to be a terrible, bloodthirsty criminal mastermind, and yet here she was cuddling a five year old! She was about to release her hold on him...but then she realized...he was no longer hyperventilating. Blinking in surprise, she looked down...and felt a slight smile grace her features when she saw him snuggling closer into her chest. Perhaps just a little longer wouldn't hurt...

Half an hour later, Cinder unwrapped her arms from around Harry's shoulders, then sat on the floor beside him.

"So...do you believe I'm friendly now?" She asked with a smirk.

Harry looked at the pretty woman sitting next to him. She had taken him away from people who regularly hurt him...She had taken him to people who made his pain go away, like Petunia had done for Dudley whenever he got injured or sick... She had shown him how warm and soothing hugs truly felt... She HAD to be friendly! Harry looked up at the woman, and nodded. He didn't notice, but he had the slightest hint of a smile on his face.

Cinder smiled, realizing she was getting through to him. "Now...I suppose you're wondering why you're here, and not back with the obese man and his pet horse?" Harry blinked. Why WASN'T he with his aunt and uncle anymore? "Well...The fat man isn't going to be a problem anymore, I can safely tell you that much." Harry felt slightly unnerved by the sadistic grin on the woman's face as she said this. "And the horse? Well, she'll never be the same again." Harry blinked.

"Wh-What did you do?" He asked.

Cinder blinked, then grimaced as she tried to think of a way to explain it gently. Unfortunately, she wasn't too good at that.

"I...I killed your uncle and...burned your aunt's face to a crisp..." She admitted sheepishly.

Harry stared at the woman, terrified. His uncle was dead?! His aunt was disfigured?! If she had done that to a couple of normal people, what was she going to do to a freak like him?!

Cinder saw him trying to scoot away. Quickly, she placed a hand on his shoulder. "...You don't think I'd do anything like that to you, do you?" Harry blinked and then nodded. Cinder frowned, then placed both hands on his shoulders and turned him so he was facing her. "Now listen to me...I only did that to them because they deserved it more than anyone I've ever met. You're their victim. If anything, I did it for you."

Harry was still unsure... She had almost casually revealed that she had murdered and mutilated the only family he had ever known... "S-So what's gonna h-happen to me now...?" He asked in a barely audible tone of voice.

Cinder frowned at the question. She had been wondering the same thing... Then, she sighed. "...You're not going back there. Not ever. ...How would you like to stay here at the base for the time being?"

Harry considered it. He could go back to his aunt and cousin, who would likely beat him to death for what happened to Vernon...Or he could stay here with the pretty, but kinda scary, woman who saved him and was actually rather nice to him. Yeah...it was obvious to him who the lesser of two evils was...

Harry looked up at Cinder, took a deep breath, and nodded. Cinder smiled. "Well then. Welcome to the group...I'm sorry. Do you have a name?"

"H-Harry..."

"Welcome to the group, Harry." Cinder said with a smile. "I'm Cinder." Harry felt a knot forming in the pit of his stomach. Was he making the

right decision? "Harry...I have some work to take care of." Cinder explained. "Will you be alright in here? I'll be back later. Okay?" Harry nodded shyly. Cinder smiled and ruffled his hair. "Good boy." She turned to the medic. "You. Help him back into the bed. Treat the rest of his injuries, and let me know when he's healed." The medic nodded and moved to pick Harry up.

Cinder nodded in satisfaction and turned to walk out the door. She didn't know why she was smiling...Did it really matter to her that he was a really adorable kid...? Cinder shook her head in irritation. Who cares how adorable or sweet he was?! She needed to focus on her wor-

Cinder's thoughts were cut off by the familiar sensation of stepping on something slippery. She stumbled forward and pitched headfirst towards the ground...and then everything went black, and she felt her head was suddenly wet.

The janitor blinked in confusion as Cinder sat up and muttered a string of curses directed at Stevie as she tried to pull a bucket off of her head.

"God damn Stevie and his god damn banana peels and his god damn stupidity..."

A/N: The whole banana peel running gag is sort of my way of adding a little humor to this whole thing.

Chapter 3

It had been a week since Cinder had taken Harry away from that bastard of an uncle, and he was healing up nicely. Cinder had come to check up on him every day. He had been a little shy at first...but he had gradually began to open up to her, and by the fifth day, he was even talking back to her, so she was no longer having one sided conversations.

And after an entire week had passed, and most of Harry's injuries had faded completely, leaving only a few scars behind, the medics told their boss that Harry was free to leave the medical wing if he wished. Cinder was glad to hear this. She could get Harry acquainted with the base, and introduce him to some of her more...un-hated minions.

So, at the end of the week, Cinder entered Harry's medical ward, and stepped inside.

"Hello, Harry." The criminal smiled warmly at the grin the little boy had whenever she came into his room.

"Hi, Miss Cinder." He said, still quiet, but not shaky, like he was when she first brought him.

"Are you feeling up to seeing more of the base?" Cinder asked. "I'd very much like to show you around." Harry looked down at his bedsheets, as if contemplating it, then back to his savior.

"Um...Okay..." He said softly.

"Good." Cinder said with a smile. "Can you stand yourself, or should I help you?" Her answer came when Harry swung his little legs over the floor, then stepped down, albeit slightly wobbly. Cinder approached his side and took his hand into hers to help him steady his balance. And with that, the tour began.

Cinder was impressed with just how much attention Harry had been paying to her as she explained the various rooms, which ones were off limits, etc. He was an incredibly well mannered child... Of course, his miserable excuse for an uncle had probably beaten this behaviour into him...

Cinder's fist that wasn't holding Harry's hand clenched tightly, and she gritted her teeth, glad that she had given the bastard what he deserved...

"Hey, Cinder!" Cinder stopped at the familiar voice, and a small smile came to her face. Turning to the source of the noise, she nodded at the familiar faces of Emerald and Mercury, who were approaching her.

"We haven't seen you in a while. What's up?" Emerald asked. Then, she noticed that Cinder was holding hands with a little boy. And when she got a good look at the child, her eyes widened, and a massive grin creeped across her face. "Oh my GOD, he's ADORABLE!" The girl squealed. Mercury chuckled and shook his head.

"Looks like someone's going soft." He teased.

"Shut up." Emerald said flatly as she quickly turned to him, then back to Harry, all while still grinning.

"Um...Th-That wasn't very n-nice..." Harry replied softly. Emerald giggled.

"Right. Right, sorry about that." She playfully ruffled the boy's hair.

"Softy!~" Mercury teased in a sing-song voice, prompting Emerald to snap her head in his direction with a glare that said "I am gonna kick your ass later." The oldest male of the group chuckled, then turned to Harry. "So, who's this little guy? And where'd he come from?"

"His name is Harry. I...rescued him." Cinder said, smirking darkly.

"I know that look. Killed a guy, didn't you?" Cinder nodded in response to Mercury's inquiry. "Heh...thought so. I'll bet it was the same guy who hurt the kid, wasn't it?"

"Yes, he was in...rough shape when I saved him from his uncle..."

"I'll never get why people would hurt family members." Emerald growled. "Bastard deserved to die..."

Harry looked down, trying to cover a couple of the scars on his face with his hands.

"Hey, no worries, kid." Mercury said calmly. "Think of those scars as a symbol of what a man you are. Seriously, just you wait until you get older. Girls dig the scars."

"Don't tell him that!" Emerald chastised. "What if he tries to give himself more scars?!" Mercury rolled his eyes.

"Do you seriously think he'd be that stupid?"

"Well...no...but better safe than sorry!"

"Whatever, Em."

"I told you not to call me that! Multiple times!"

"Well, it's been wonderful seeing you two, but Harry and I must finish the tour now."

"Aw...Bye, Harry. " Emerald waved.

"Later, buddy." Mercury nodded.

"B-Bye." Harry said with a small wave. And with that, the leader of the organization led Harry away. After they had neared the end of the hallway, however, Cinder stepped on something slippery, losing her grip on Harry's hand and causing her to clumsily roll across the floor like a wheel until she slammed facefirst into the wall, comically

flattening herself up against it, with her limbs gone spread eagle, before regaining her previous width and pulling herself off of the wall to reveal an indent in the shape of her body. The woman clutched at her head with one hand and muttered death threats under her breath,

"A-Are you okay, Miss Cinder?!" Harry asked, concerned.

"Yes...I'm used to this sort of thing..." The crime lord replied, rather unphased by her misfortune. "...Hello, Stevie."

"Hiya, Cinder! Who's the little guy?! Can I hug him?"

"No. No you may not. If you do, I will burn you from the feet up."

"Okay!"

"Harry, this is Stevie. ...Stay away from him if you can. Trust me."

"Okay." Harry didn't know why, but this Stevie guy rubbed him the wrong way.

"Hey, Cinder, Can I-"

"Whatever it is, the answer is no." Cinder said calmly as she led Harry away.

"...Go to the medical room to heal this wound I got when Emerald stabbed me?" Stevie finished his sentence once Harry and Cinder were out of earshot, then promptly passed out due to blood loss.

And so, the tour had finished. It had taken the entirety of the day to show Harry around, much to Cinder's surprise...and then the little boy yawned softly. Cinder smiled at him fondly, then decided now would be a better time than ever to show him a little surprise she had set up for him...

"Are you tired, Harry?"

"N-No...I'm fine..." Harry was clearly struggling to keep his eyes open while he said this. Cinder smiled, then bent down and picked him up in her arms and held him. Harry snuggled up closer, enjoying the unusual warmth of the young woman's body. He barely registered it when she started carrying him...and before Cinder had even reached her destination, he had already fallen asleep.

Cinder felt a slight twinge of disappointment, as she had wanted to see his reaction to the surprise...but she supposed she could wait until tomorrow. Shrugging, she finally reached her destination. She opened a door in the hallway, and stepped into a decently sized room, with a large bed, a few dressers, a nice blue carpet...

It was Harry's new bedroom.

The criminal gently placed the child on the bed so that his head was resting on the feather pillow she had asked one of her minions to "borrow" from a nearby furniture store, then tucked him in so that the queen-sized blanket, "borrowed" from the same store, was just under his chin. Cinder took a few moments to look at the sleeping child, and smiled when she realized that he was rather adorable when he slept. The young woman turned around and walked out of the room, making sure to turn off the light as she left.

Once she got out into the hallway, Cinder's smile faded, and she looked confused and frustrated. What the hell was happening to her?! She was supposed to be a diabolical criminal mastermind, not some nanny to a kid she just happened to stumble across...some kid who desperately needed to be loved...and was just so cute-Cinder pounded her fists against her head in frustration and growled as she walked down the hallway. She briefly considered changing her attitude towards the kid...but immediately knew that she could never bring herself to do that after building up his trust in her...But she was getting way too attached...She wasn't fit to be his caretaker! She was only eighteen, for crying out loud! Harry was such a sweet child, and she was a criminal. It just wouldn't work! But...why did she feel so warm inside whenever she was around him? Rubbing her temples,

the young woman sighed, and decided to get some sleep. Maybe she'd be able to come up with something in the morning...

Chapter 4

Harry's eyes fluttered open...and he was immediately greeted with pitch darkness. The little boy's heart dropped down into a black abyss in his stomach. It was all a dream...He had never been saved...He was still locked away in his dark, cramped cupboard...He wanted to cry when he realized this...But he couldn't cry...He got hit when he cried...

Then, there was a knock outside the cupboard door. Harry yelped in terror upon hearing the noise, and then he began to hyperventilate as he hugged his knees and began rocking back and forth. He didn't want Vernon to hurt him...He wanted to be normal...He didn't want to be hurt anymore...

The door threw itself open, and Harry curled up in a ball.

It was Cinder, come to wake Harry for breakfast. She had heard his frantic noises from the other side of the door, and out of concern, she had thrown the door open to see him curled up in a ball, covering his face and trembling in terror.

Cinder's eyes widened in slight worry, and she quickly flicked on the light switch and moved to Harry's side.

"Harry." She called out, trying to sound firm, but failing due to an audible worry in her voice. He was breathing too heavily to hear her. "Harry!" Cinder placed a hand on Harry's side and gently shook him. She was immensely surprised when Harry screamed in fear and retreated to the other side of the bed.

"I'M SORRY, I WON'T DO IT AGAIN, I'LL BE GOOD, I'M SORRY UNCLE VERNON, DON'T HURT ME, PLEASE-"

Cinder didn't fully know what compelled her to do it, but as the little boy frantically apologized, she had found herself sitting on the bed

and pulling him into a tight embrace. She didn't know what to think of it at first...but she internally told herself that she just wanted him to be quiet.

Harry flinched and whimpered at the feeling of physical contact...but then he realized it wasn't bringing any pain with it. Blinking, he looked up and saw the frowning face of Cinder Fall. He realized...he wasn't at Vernon's. He wasn't locked in his cupboard. He might not get beaten...

The little boy's body trembled slightly, and with a small sob, he buried his face into the young woman's chest.

Cinder felt slightly ashamed of herself as the sound of the small boy's sob tugged at her heartstrings...But she couldn't fight the intense desire to make him feel better. So she began to stroke the back of his little head, making soft shushing noises.

"Shhh...It's all right, Harry...You're safe now...Far away from the fat man..." Harry clutched at her dress tightly as he tried to fight back sobs...

Cinder wanted to put Harry down...but she couldn't bring herself to do it. Was she getting too attached to the little boy...?

Chapter 5

Cinder frowned across the dining room table at Harry, who was nibbling on his toast. His clothes were far too big for him, they were filthy, and torn... It was official. He needed new clothes.

"Emerald! Mercury!" The two henchmen who happened to be walking by heard their names called, and approached.

"What's up, boss?" Mercury asked. Cinder glared, and Mercury rolled his eyes. "What can we do for you, Miss Cinder?" Cinder smirked.

"I'm going clothes shopping for Harry, and I need you two to come with me." Harry, Emerald and Mercury all looked at her in surprise.

"Uh...what do you need us for?" Emerald asked.

"Well, you don't honestly expect me to carry the bags myself, do you?" Cinder asked, still smirking.

"Of course that would be the reason..." Emerald groaned.

"HEY GUYS!"

"Ugh...Hello, Stevie." Cinder groaned.

"I wanna go shopping too! I'm super duper good at it"

"You're GOOD at shopping? Okay." Mercury scoffed.

"No, no, Stevie." Cinder said nervously, waving her hands side to side. "That won't be necesarry. I think you should stay here and do...whatever it is Stevies do."

"Okay!" Stevie waddled off. Cinder sighed in relief, then turned to Harry.

"Come along, Harry, we're going to get you some nice new clothes to wear."

"Wh-Why?" Harry asked softly.

"Because you need them." Cinder replied simply before walking over and picking him up. "Come along now..." After thoroughly inspecting for banana peels, Cinder carried the little boy out the door, with Emerald and Mercury following close behind her.

And so...

Cinder was irritated and Mercury and Emerald were highly amused. Stevie had chosen to follow them after all, and made some hilariously bad attempts at "stealth." Every time one of them turned around, he would attempt to hide. One time, he had hidden behind Emerald, who was much skinnier than him, as well as one of the people he was trying to hide FROM. Another, he had picked a pebble up off the street and held it in front of his face, giggling and snickering about how they'd never find him. And then he had decided to forget about hiding entirely, and opted to wear a disguise... A hilariously goofy fake moustache and a nametag that said "Hello! My name is NOT Stevie!" Cinder sighed and turned around.

"FINE! YOU CAN COME WITH US! JUST DON'T ANNOY US!"

"YAAAAAAY!" Stevie cheered before skipping ahead of them. Cinder saw the bananas he had packed in his pocket, and let out a slight whimper, tightening her hold on Harry as if he were her last lifeline.

And so...

The group of five arrived at the mall. Cinder, Emerald, Mercury and Harry got in without a hitch. Stevie moved to follow them, but was stopped by building security.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but pets aren't allowed in the building." Stevie grinned.

"I'm not a pet, silly! I'm-"

"Sorry,Stevie,youheardthemannopetsallowedbye!" Cinder ran away as fast as possible, and Emerald and Mercury followed with shrugs. Stevie sat down on the curb and pulled out a banana.

Later...

"All right, I think I got some good clothes for him to try on-" Emerald grabbed a t-shirt from the pile Mercury brought and wrinkled her nose in distaste.

"Seriously? That's so tacky!" Mercury rolled his eyes.

"He's a kid. It's a dinosaur shirt. Kids like dinosaurs. They don't have your picky sense of fashion." Emerald roughly elbowed him, then turned away with a huff.

"Well done, Mercury." Cinder said, nodding in approval. "Come on, let's get him changed."

They spent a good half an hour watching Harry try on new outfits. Jeans, t-shirts, sweat pants, pajamas, shoes, a panda costume-wait what?

Cinder and Mercury raised their brows in confusion when Harry walked out of the stall wearing a panda suit. They turned to Emerald, who had her hands over her mouth to muffle the squealing sounds that came out.

"Oh my god he's so cute, look at him!" She gushed quietly.

"So dinosaur t-shirts are too tacky for your tastes, but panda costumes are okay, is that what's happening here?" Mercury said, rolling his eyes. Emerald grinned sheepishly.

"Uh...It could make a good Halloween costume?" She said.

"Yes, well..." Cinder stood and walked to Harry's side. "As adorable as you look, Harry, I think it's time you put on some regular clothing." And so Harry changed to the dinosaur t-shirt that made Emerald groan and a pair of jeans. Cinder smiled. "Very good. There, aren't you glad you don't have to walk around in those old rags now?" Cinder's expression turned into one of surprise when Harry hugged her leg.

"Thank you..." He said softly.

"Uh...Y-Yes, you're welcome..." She said awkwardly, petting Harry's head. Harry stopped hugging her, then moved on to Mercury and hugged his leg as well.

"Whoa, hey, we got a hugger here!" Mercury chuckled. When Harry moved on to Emerald, she predictably picked him up and hugged him before he had even gotten close to her.

"You are SO welcome, Harry!" Cinder couldn't help but smile, which she hid by placing a hand over her mouth. He really was rather adorable... Scowling, the young woman shook her head. She couldn't... She needed to get her mind on something else, so she cleared her throat.

"Well, now that that's out of the way, how about we get something to eat?" And with that, she lead her little group to the food court.

Meanwhile...

Stevie finished peeling his banana, and tossed the peel over his shoulder so it landed just in front of the doors the second before they closed. A man entered the mall, opening the doors and causing the banana peel to go sliding across the floor. A group of people walked over the peel, miraculously managing to avoid slipping, and somehow carried it over to the escalators. The peel went up the escalator, and a janitor happened to come by and sweep it up. He placed it in the dust pan and dumped it in the trash can. Moments after he left, a couple of rowdy teens ran by, roughhousing, until one

of them accidentally knocked the trash can over, causing it to fall over the side of the railing. The banana peel fell out. Cinder, who was leading Harry, Emerald and Mercury to the food court, stepped on it, staggered forward with a yelp in surprise, then fell into the fountain, splashing water on her companions. Everyone in the vicinity looked over to see Cinder's butt sticking out of the water of the fountain. It wiggled slightly as Cinder's upper body emerged with a gasp, her hair now matted to her face. Her face contorted in frustration, and she threw her hands into the air and screamed into the sky.

"STEEEEEEEEEEEEVIEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

"Sorry, boss, I can't come in! I'm not allowed!" Cinder vaguely heard Stevie call from the entrance. She growled. WHY did she hire that idiot?

Chapter 6

"So now what do we do?" Mercury asked, holding the bag of clothes.

"We go back to the base of course." Cinder replied simply. Emerald and Mercury both groaned. Cinder frowned. "Is there a problem?"

"Yeah, I'm sick of being cooped up in that base! We've been working like dogs, I want to get some fresh air for a bit longer!" Emerald complained. Cinder rolled her eyes, then looked down at Harry, who was snug in her arms, thoughtfully. He WAS rather pale...Maybe some fresh air would do him good.

"Well...I guess a little more fresh air couldn't hurt..."

"YAAAAY! LET'S GO PLAY AT THE PARK!" Stevie exclaimed before dashing off.

"...I suppose we're going to the park then." Cinder said flatly, before following her mentally challenged henchman.

When they arrived at the park, Stevie was playing on the monkey bars. And by that, I mean he was standing on the ground holding onto the bars with a big stupid grin on his face.

"This is so much fun!" He said happily.

"Does he even have more than two functioning brain cells?" Emerald muttered.

"Three at the most." Mercury agreed.

"Forget him." Cinder said before setting Harry down. "It's not nice to pick on the mentally challenged." She turned to Harry, expecting him to run off to play on the slide, or swings, or monkey bars or something. Instead, he just stood there, looking around in confusion.

"Harry?" Harry turned to see her looking at him. "Aren't you going to do something?"

"A-Am I supposed to?" Harry asked softly. Cinder sighed. The fat bastard really did damage him psychologically...

"I think you should. Be a kid. Have fun." Cinder insisted.

"Okay...Um..." Harry looked around. He wasn't sure what to do...

"What's up, buddy? Haven't you been on a playground before?" Harry shook his head.

"U-Uncle Vernon said freaks don't go outside..."

"Sounds like this Vernon guy's the real freak." Emerald muttered before smiling and grabbing Harry's hand. "Come on, Mercury and I will show you the ropes here!"

"We will?" Mercury asked before yelping as Emerald grabbed his ear and dragged him off, leading Harry towards the playground. "I MEAN OF COURSE WE WILL PLEASE LET GO OF MY EAR OWOWOWOWOW!"

Cinder smirked at the scene, and leaned back on the bench. She turned to look at Stevie. He was currently being yelled at by the parents on the playground for hogging the monkey bars. After a while of not getting through to him, the parents opted to grab Stevie and throw him away.

"Are you having fun, Stevie?" Cinder asked sarcastically.

"Yeah! I was until they threw me off the monkey bars!" Stevie said happily. "Oh well! I'm just gonna have a little snack!" Cinder made a mental note to be extremely careful before turning to watch Harry, Emerald and Mercury. She couldn't help but smile softly as she watched. Harry was well and truly enjoying himself, from being pushed on the swing, to going down the slide, to climbing around on

the jungle gym. She felt an immense warmth in her heart seeing a huge genuine smile on his face after so much time seeing him quiet and terrified of his own shadow.

Emerald and Mercury seemed to be having fun as well. It amused the young woman how enthusiastic the two of them were about playing on a children's playground. She watched them have their fun for a good couple hours, before deciding that would be a good time to return to the base. She stepped off the bench, completely forgetting that Stevie was eating a banana earlier. Predictably, she fell forward. It was rather dark when she opened her eyes, and she found that while her lower body could move just fine, she could not move her torso. She scowled when she realized she had gotten her upper body stuck in the sand pit. Well, no matter. Surely someone would be quick to help her out, right?

Stevie pointed at the twitching legs sticking from the sand. "Hey, why's Cinder allowed to play with the playground stuff and not me?" He pouted.

5 minutes later...

"All right, kid, ready?" Mercury asked.

"Yeah!" Harry replied.

"All right, here goes!" And with that, he pulled the swing back, ran forward with it, and let go once he reached the swing's limit. Harry laughed and cheered as the swing began to move back and forth.

"Has it occured to you that we're basically children right now?" Emerald asked.

"Eh, it's keeping the kid happy." Mercury shrugged.

"Yeah, he's adorable when he's happy." Emerald agreed fondly.

"Cinder's probably smiling up a storm right now, watching him enjoying himself." Mercury chuckled, unaware that Cinder's legs were now flailing in the air in her struggles to pull herself out from the sand.

15 minutes later...

Emerald once again caught Harry just as he came down from the slide and twirled him around playfully, causing him to giggle.

"Wanna go down again?" She said enthusiastically.

"Yes please!" Harry said with a nod and smile before climbing back up the slide.

"He's so polite." Emerald said with a smile.

"Guess the fat guy beat it into him." Mercury said, a slightly bitter tone in his voice.

"I really hope Cinder made him suffer before he died." Emerald agreed somberly, before jumping right back to happy and upbeat as Harry came down once more and she caught him and twirled him again.

"What's the point of doing that, anyway? You've done it every time he's come down that slide."

"Don't question me, it makes him laugh, and that's good enough reason for me to do it, so there!" Emerald stuck her tongue out at Mercury as Harry made his way back up the slide.

"Seriously? How old are you?" Mercury teased.

"We're on a children's playground right now. Age means nothing."

"Touche."

"We've been here a while, I thought Cinder would have wanted to leave by now."

"Eh, she'll let us know when she's ready." In the background, Cinder had managed to force her feet against the ground, and was currently pushing against it to try to pull herself out.

30 minutes later...

"Um...Emerald? Mercury?" Harry said.

"Yeah, buddy?" Mercury replied.

"What's up?" Emerald said.

"Um...What's that over there?" They looked in the direction the little boy was pointing. Mercury laughed.

"Some chick got stuck in the sand pit...That's gotta suck." Emerald looked too, seeing a pair of legs sticking from the sand, pushing against the ground, the woman rocking her rear end back and forth as she struggles to escape.

"Uh...Mercury? Doesn't that dress look familiar at all?" Mercury raised a brow, then took another look. His eyes widened in realization.

"Oh. Ooooooh. Oh...Huh...CRAP, HOW LONG HAS SHE BEEN THERE?!"

"Oooh, I hope she doesn't get mad at us..." Emerald said nervously.

"She probably will if she's in there long enough!" Mercury said.

"Keep your voice down, you're freaking Harry out!" Emerald snapped.

"Uh...sorry...Anyway, let's go help-" He was interrupted as Cinder finally managed to pull her upper body out of the sand with a loud

gasp.

"Are you done playing, Cin-" Cinder interrupted Stevie by punching him in the face, knocking him unconscious. She wiped some sand out of her hair, then sighed heavily.

"That was unpleasant..." She muttered. Her eyes widened in surprise as she felt something latch onto her leg. She looked down to see Harry hugging her leg once again.

"I'm sorry..." He said quietly. "I'm so sorry..." Cinder frowned.

"For what?"

"I-I should've seen you stuck...I should've helped you, I-" Cinder knelt down and quieted him by placing her index finger over his lips.

"It's alright. You didn't do anything wrong. I'm glad you had fun. I'd willingly stick my upper body in a sand pit a hundred times over to see a smile on your face." Harry looked up at her and smiled, then hugged her. Cinder smiled warmly, then her face contorted into one of shock and confusion. What was she saying, and why did it feel so right to say it?! She looked over to Emerald and Mercury, who were grinning at her nervously. "...You two are such children." She muttered in exasperation. "Getting too distracted over a children's playground to notice that I was stuck... It's both embarrassing and comedic for both you and me..."

"Sorry, boss..." Emerald apologized.

"Yeah, sorry..." Mercury agreed. Cinder smirked.

"Well, I think we've been here long enough...Let's return to base. Mercury, grab Stevie, Emerald, grab Harry's clothes."

"But he's heavy!" Mercury exclaimed.

"I'm supposed to carry all that by myself?!" Emerald complained.

"Consider it payback for leaving me to pull myself out of the sand pit." Cinder said before picking Harry up. Harry smiled up at her, then yawned softly. Cinder smiled. "It's been a busy day for you, hasn't it? You must be exhausted." Harry's eyes glazed over slightly. Cinder smirked. "Well, I suppose you can take a nap when we get back to the base..." And with that, the group began walking, Emerald struggling to see due to the bags she's carrying, and Mercury almost getting crushed by Stevie's weight.

At the base...

Cinder carried Harry back to his room, allowing Emerald to dump off the bags in front of his door, saying she would bring them in, then gently placed him in his bed. He looked up at her with a sleepy smile, and she felt the confounded warmth inside her once more. It was getting harder and harder to distract herself from it, and the young woman didn't even notice as she started softly humming a lullaby to lull him to sleep. Once he was finally alseep, she caught herself, and whipped her head towards the open door in the hope that no one had seen. She turned to glare at the sleeping boy, but merely resting her eyes on his peaceful sleeping form was enough to melt her heart. Her maternal instinct took over once more, and she leaned down, and gently kissed his forehead, causing his smile to widen. Cinder smiled widely, and left the room, unable to stop smiling. She gave the sleeping child one more smile before closing the door.

Emerald and Mercury were on their way to their own quarters when they saw Cinder smiling happily.

"Huh...Never seen her that happy before." Mercury mused.

"Well, it's pretty obvious who caused it." Emerald said with a smirk.

"Yeah, she loves the little guy." The two turned to look at the door to Harry's bedroom. "She'd give up criminal business for him if she had to..."

Harry had a wonderful dream where he had a mother. The mother looked exactly like Cinder...but it couldn't be. No one would want him as a son... But he could dream...

Author's Note

All right, I'm posting this on each story so that I can get a variety of people's attention.

Hey guys, thanks a lot for following my stories. I'm glad you enjoy them so much, but I'll admit, I can't take ALL the credit. I do have a writing partner, FireKitsune1. He's a great guy, and I love working with him, but we've come to a disagreement. You see, I've made this whole "adopted abused Harry" thing into a recurring thing in my fics. I love doing them with different characters, and seeing how I can differentiate them. However, FireKitsune is getting a little pissed at me, because I keep adding in new mothers. Here's a list of the mothers:

Lucy [Elfen Lied]

Virgo [Fairy Tail]

Blair [Soul Eater]

Cinder [RWBY]

Ruby [RWBY]

Weiss [RWBY]

Blake [RWBY]

Yang [RWBY]

Ada [Resident Evil]

Mikasa [Attack on Titan]

Yoko [Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann]

Mizore [Rosario + Vampire]

Ahri [League of Legends]

Sona [League of Legends]

Akali [League of Legends]

Raynare [High School DxD]

Moka [Rosario + Vampire]

Annie [Attack on Titan]

Rukia [Bleach]

Seras [Hellsing]

Lucina [Fire Emblem]

Black Rock Shooter [Black Rock Shooter]

Samus [Metroid]

Yoruichi [Bleach]

Raven [Teen Titans]

Ryuko [Kill la Kill]

Satsuki [Kill la Kill]

Asuna [Sword Art Online]

Pyrrha [RWBY]

Shana [Shakugan no Shana]

Yes, it's a lot. And considering the fact that I'll likely add more to the list, and that I do take requests [provided I take an interest in the

character], FireKitsune's feeling a little overwhelmed. That's problematic for both of us, because...I don't think myself capable of doing these on my own. I do have a couple other people to help me, Gilgamesh the King, who has flat out admitted that the fluffy stuff is not his thing, and marethyu-the-proxy, who's been having trouble getting online as of late... So, yeah, me and FireKitsune end up doing a large percentage of the work, and he's at his wits end. We even got into an argument about it today that nearly ended our partnership. I can't do all this on my own, and even with two people it's a lot. That's where you guys come in. I really, REALLY hate to ask, but I'm getting a little bit desperate here... I was hoping some of you might be willing to step in and help me out with planning for some of these fics. If things keep going the way they are for me and FireKitsune, I fear that we may end up having to cancel these altogether. I don't want to cancel them, but we barely managed to reconcile, and if I keep getting him to do all these himself, he'll probably snap eventually and just give up on me entirely, which would end up causing me painful memories every time I update one of the fics. Besides, I need something to work off of, and other writers are excellent sources for that.

Again, I'm very sorry to ask this of you guys, and if any of you out there are able and willing to plan these out with me, I will be eternally grateful. If you'll help, just send me a message, and I'll explain what you need to do. Thanks immensely once again, and here's hoping things will turn out all right. I'm not putting any limits as to how many people can help, either. To quote Dr. Eggman himself, You know what they say, the more the merrier!

Chapter 8

Cinder really wanted to burn something really bad late the next morning. The reason being the cocky asshole that was in front of her at this moment.

"So, you want to collaborate with my group on one of your little get rich quick schemes." She said calmly.

"Exactly, Dollface." The white hair man said with a Italian mafia accent and a cocky tone. "Together, both our organizations will get richer then we can imagine."

"Our organiztations?" Cinder said with a raised brow. "You don't have anyone working under you. Oh, and if you ever call me dollface again, I WILL hurt you without hesitation."

"Hey, lady, I'm more than enough to make an organization all by myself." The man replied with a frown.

Cinder's eye twitched at his statement. 'This guy is so full of it.' Cinder thought to herself as she glared at the man.

"Aw, what's with the look, toots?"

"Your really full of it Mr. Giles, and I will not expend any resources or people to help you." Cinder told him firmly.

Giles frowned. "Aw come on!" He exclaimed. "I'll give you ten percent of the money!"

Cinder rubbed the bridge of her nose in irritation. "No, I'm not going to help you on something that will most likely end in disaster." Cinder told him.

"Why the hell not?!" He exclaimed.

"Because part of that get rich scheme was to literally storm right into a high security bank!" Cinder told him in a peeved tone. "It's a half baked plan and I'm not going to waste my time on a idiotic plan and the idiot person that thought it up. Stevie could at least think of a semi-decent plan." Cinder explained, throwing up in her mouth a little for giving Stevie a compliment of any kind.

"Thanks, Boss!" Stevie said as he walked by, tossing his banana peel in the doorway.

Cinder made no indication that she heard him. 'I just know that I'm going to end up slipping on that peel.' Cinder thought with a mental sigh before turning her attention back to Giles. "Anyway, I don't think we have any reason to talk about this anymore." Cinder told him as his face contorted into a furious expression. "I think that you know how to get out of here." Cinder said with a smirk.

"This ain't over, lady! I'll get ya back for this!" Giles snapped as he rose to his feet.

"You can try. Now get out." Cinder told him with a serious face.

"Um...Miss Cinder?" Harry poked his head into the room.

Cinder looked at him in surprise as Giles turns to look at Harry with a scowl. "Who's the brat." Giles said rudely. Cinder responded by launching him across the room with a blast of fire to the chest. Giles yelps as he hits the wall and slides down. He quickly stood up and clutched the spot where her fire hit him, which was now a ashy substance with little particles gathering to the spot and healing him. He looked up at Cinder, wincing. "Lady, you could've burned my ashes away!"

Cinder narrows his eyes at him. "That was a warning shot, next time you call him a brat, I will not be so merciful."

The man scowled. "Whatever...I'm out...You're gonna pay for this, you bitch, you hear me?!" He storms out the room and takes a quick

glance at Harry before he leave the room. He already knew how he was going to get his revenge... He smirked evilly as he walked out the building, already forming a plan in his mind.

Cinder, for her part, turned to Harry. She breaths in and out to calm herself before saying anything to Harry. "How may I help you Harry?" Cinder asked him calmly.

"Um...The cooks wanted me to tell you lunch is ready..." He said softly.

Cinder smiles and gets up. "Alright then, why don't we go to the dining area together?" Cinder told him with a kind smile. After two minutes of walking, they finally arrived to the dining room where Emerald, Mercury, and Stevie was sitting at the table. Cinder's eyes widened in remembrance...She had managed to avoid slipping on the banana peel Stevie had tossed earlier!

She smiled in victory until as stepped on a banana peel that Stevie left there after breakfast and slipped on it. She lets Harry's hand go in shock and landed on her back. One of the chefs tripped over her, and a bowl of tomato soup flew out of his hand and came back down on top of her face. If it weren't for the fact that her flame based semblance made her heat resistant, the fact that a bowl of hot soup splashed on her face would be making her scream in agony right now. Instead, she calmly grabs the bowl and pulls it off her face, revealing her irritated expression. Her entire head was covered in the red liquid, and it was dripping onto the floor.

"Hey miss Cinder! You have soup on your head." Stevie pointed out the obvious with his usual goofy smile. Then he proceeded to reach down and eat some of the soup off of her head. "Mmm! Yummy!"

Cinder looks at him in irritation. "Get away from me Stevie." Cinder told him with a murderous undertone.

"Sorry!" Stevie replied cheerfully as he returned to his own meal.

"Thank you." Cinder said as one of the chefs came over and handed her a towel to get rid of the soup off her. After that was done with, the young woman joined them in lunch. It was a meal that consisted of Grilled cheese with turkey slices and tomato soup. It didn't take long for everyone to finish.

"Man, that was good." Mercury stated while resisting the urge to belch.

"Indeed." Cinder agreed. "Did you enjoy your meal, Harry?"

Harry looked up at her and smiled. "I did Miss Cinder." Harry told her.

"I'm very glad to hear that." Cinder replied with a smile.

"So how did the meeting with Giles go?" Emerald asked her leader, causing Cinder to frown.

"We won't be doing business with him anytime soon." She replied.

"That bad?" Mercury asked her earning a nod from Cinder. "That man's arrogance was limitless and his plan was worse." Cinder explained.

"He just wanted to bullheadedly rush in, didn't he?" Emerald asked.

"You read my mind, Emerald." Cinder replied.

Emerald giggled. "He won't last that long in this business." Emerald said.

"I give him six days before he gets put in jail." Mercury agreed. They both started laughing as they started speculating what he will be thrown in jail for. Cinder shook her head with a smile and turned to Harry.

"I'm free for the rest of the day, what would you like to do?" Cinder asked him.

Harry blinked and looked at her with a tilted head. "Oh...Um...I'm not sure..." He replied softly.

Cinder chuckles and pats his head. "It's alright, we can just hang around for now." Harry smiled as she picked him up and held him. He placed his head on her chest as she started to stroke his head. Then she blushed and realized what she was doing. Cinder looks up to see Mercury and Emerald giving her knowing looks. Stevie, however, was staring as a fly that was buzzing around his head. "Um...Well I'm...going out for a while..." Cinder said curtly, moving out of the room at a brisk pace. Emerald and Mercury looks at her retreating form in confusion.

"Was it something we said?" Mercury asked when they heard a smacking sound and a crash. The fly that Stevie was looking at landed on his forehead and he attempted to smack it but missed and ended up falling backwards in his chair.

"Did I get it guys?" Stevie asked when the fly landed on his head again.

"Let me get that for you..." Mercury said as he picked up his chair.

"I'll help." Emerald agreed as she picked up her own. They go to his sides and smashes the chairs into Stevie's face, killing the fly.

"Thanks...guys." Stevie thanked before losing consciousness. Emerald and Mercury high-fived.

Meanwhile, Cinder was still walking with Harry in her arms. "Now, you're sure there's nothing in particular you would like to do?" She asked.

Harry shakes his head no. "It doesn't really matter what we do, I just want to spend it with you." Harry told her, causing Cinder's heart to melt.

"Well then...I'll take you to my bedroom and see if I can find a book to read you..."

Harry smiled and nodded. "Okay." Harry said happily as he enjoyed being in Cinder's arms. Cinder had the warmest hugs... Within moments, they arrived at the room that belonged to Cinder. Cinder gently placed Harry down in her bed and sat down next to him.

"Stay put while I find a book." Cinder told him while she went to her small library and looked for a book to read him that was age appropriate. She blushed when she saw Ninjas of Love on the shelf. 'I better hide that before Harry sees it.' Cinder told herself as she looked for a little bit longer before she stopped at a book with a light blue cover. 'Cinderella, that'll be perfect.' Cinder thought as she removed the book from it's place and went back to her bed. "I'll just settle on a nice, classic fairy tale." She said calmly. She took a seat next to Harry and pulled him to her lap. The little boy smiled and nestled in closer. When he was comfortable, Cinder opened the book and started reading the words under the pictures.

"Once upon a time, there was a beautiful maiden who lived with her Father." Cinder started, with Harry already fully enticed with the story.

Harry suddenly found himself realizing he and Cinderella weren't so different. As she read on, he realized more about how much He and Cinderella. Having to live with relatives that treated them like dirt, wanting to have a better life, and ended up getting it in the end. Before long, Cinder reached the end of the book. "And she lived happily ever after." Cinder read out, ending the story and closing the book.

"Just like me..." Harry said softly.

Cinder looked at him in confusion. "Who's just like you?" Cinder asked.

"Cinderella...She's just like me..." Harry replied softly. "She had to live with relatives that didn't like her, she wanted something better, and someone helps her wish come true." Harry explained.

"Someone...made your wish come true..." Cinder breathed. "You mean me...?" Harry smiled and nodded. "Harry..." Cinder breathed. She felt an uncomfortable warmth flow through her chest. She hasn't felt this kind of warmth before and didn't know what to make of it. And when she looked at Harry's smiling face, it got stronger and stronger until she felt like her chest was going to explode. Instinctively, she hugged Harry as close as she could. She had felt tingling in her chest when she was around him...But never this ridiculous amount of warmth... It felt even more warm then her flames.

Harry snuggled into her and yawned, felling sleepy. Cinder blinked and looked down at him. She smiled. She'd best get him to bed... "I guess it's time for your nap." Cinder told him as she picked him up. Harry looked at her for a moment...then dozed right off in her arms. She smiled as she left her room and headed towards Harry's room. She slowly opened the door, then placed him in his bed, nice and snug. She smiled at him and brushed a few hairs away form his eyes. "Sleep tight Harry." Cinder said before heading onwards the door and gently closes it, looking at him for a few moments before closing the door.

Little did she know, after she had left, ashes began to flow from a crack in the wall...

Chapter 9

A couple hours after Cinder put Harry down to rest, she decided to check on him. If he was having another Nightmare, she'd want to be there. Sighing to herself, trying not to smile warmly and retain an aura of dignity, she pushed the door open and peeked inside. Only to find...he was gone. A twinge of worry and confusion washed over her. Did he try to come and find her? Observing closer, she found that it wasn't the case. Several books and had fallen off of their places on their shelves. The Bed wasn't made. Harry always made his bed! Now she was scared. What had happened?! Where was he?! Then, she saw a piece of paper on the bed. Shaking, she picked it up and looked at it. It was a message... 'You shouldn't have messed with me, Miss Flame.'

Of course...of COURSE! Her hands and eyes caught fire. Giles...that disgusting waste of a man! He'd kidnapped her Harry! She closed her eyes and gritted her teeth with rage. Who knew what that horrible man was doing to him... The thought of it made her sick to her stomach... Luckily, she knew where to find him. He was an idiot...He had revealed his hideout to her during her talk with him. She was going to pay him a visit...

Meanwhile...

Harry was scared. Very, VERY scared. He had been lying in his bed, when the mean man who had argued with his caretaker appeared in his room, covered his mouth in a cloth and ran off with him. And now he was lying on a table, tied to it by ropes wrapped around his little wrists. The mean man stood over him with a horrible grin on his face. "Before Miss Flame shows up, I might as well have a little fun with you, brat." Harry shook his head, struggling harder in his bonds. They bit into his skin, making him cry out in pain. Out of nowhere, a punch caused him to see Stars. There was an audible crunch from the man's large fist, signifying Harry's nose was broken, and he was bleeding. He let out a cry, wishing he could clutch it. He let the

punishment continue, more and more punches raining down on him until he was a bloody mess. Then, the man pulled out a heated iron bar. He wasn't planning on HITTING the kid with it, oh no. He didn't want to KILL him, he just wanted to send him back to Miss Flame beaten to a pulp. He was going to hold the bar against his skin, and burn him...

Meanwhile...

Cinder had sprinted out of the building as fast as her legs would carry her. Nothing was going to slow her down...She was going to kill the son of a bitch, and she was going to rescue the little boy. Cinder's eyes narrowed imagining how terrified Harry must be right now... With a glare, she somehow managed to go even faster than before.

Eventually, the young woman reached the building the scouts had confirmed the kidnapper to be in. She wasn't worried in the slightest. Emerald had seen the man, and from the description, she recognized him as a naive newcomer to the criminal underground that was probably trying to prove himself in some way by kidnapping one of the top dogs...Idiot didn't even have any underlings yet...

Her thoughts were interrupted when a scream sounded through the night air.

Harry's scream...

Without a second thought, Cinder blew the door of the building clean off its hinges...and promptly froze at the sight. There was the...the B*** who had the nerve to steal the child she had been caring for so lovingly for the past few months...and he was beating Harry with a heated metal fire poker. The child had fallen unconscious from the pain. His bare back was covered in burns. And then, the monster had the AUDACITY to SMIRK at her!

"Cinder, you actually ca-" The criminal froze at the expression on the crime lord's face. His eyes widened as he realized that he had made

a very grave mistake indeed...

The world came to a standstill around Cinder, everything coming to a silent holt as her eyes burned into the man's face, the fire in them burning and glowing more than ever before. Her lips were pulled back into a snarl, her shoulders shaking, and most shocking of all was the fact that she could actually fell tears falling from the corners of her eyes.

Cinder had only ever cried three time in her life, and two of those times had been when she was too young to know any better, before she learned that it was a sign of weakness. But these tears weren't weak, they were powerful, filled with her rage at the sight of her charge…no, her Harry being subjected to such horrors.

She had made a promise to both him and herself that he would never feel pain like this again, like he had been dealt at the hands of his whale of an uncle…this was like seeing him for the first time again.

Barely paying the man that had kidnapped her boy any attention, Cinder flicked her wrist and sent a fireball at him, strong enough to send him into a wall and burn him before he could even get out a scream. She had just enough time to regret making it so quick, wishing she had made him suffer more before ending him, before a new sound reached her ears.

Harry was waking up, and he was crying, quietly as if afraid to make a sound.

Cinder was at his side instantly, all thoughts of the man that did this momentarily forgotten, as she focused all her attention on the boy. She quickly untied him, closing her eyes for a moment when she saw the rope burns around his wrists where he had struggled against them, before pulling the now wailing boy into her arms.

Cinder was careful to avoid touching the burn marks on his back, but still held him as close as she could without hurting him, her face

pressed into the top of his head as his hair tickled her nose.

The moment he seemed to realise it was her, she felt his tiny fists grabbing the front of her dress as tightly as he could, his face pressed into her chest as much as he was able to in his weakened state as his cries only increased.

It both warmed and broke her heart at the same time.

"M-Miss Cinder!" He cried, shocked. Cinder stroked his head.

"Hush...he's all gone...the mean man is gone..."

He continued to cry into the woman's chest, burying his face into her dress as far as he could. Cinder silently lifted him up out of the chair rocking him back and forth as she left the abandoned building. This day had taken a dark turn... She glared over at the pile of ashes that had been Giles and scowled. An ironic way for a foolish man to go... Harry's wails eventually softened, reducing to light whimpers here and there. He refused to let Cinder go. She was one of the only nice things here... He asked her miserably, "W-what did I...do wrong..?"

Cinder huffed. All her hard work, fixing him to be a real child...gone. "Nothing, dear...ABSOLUTELY NOTHING." She said soothingly. "It was HIM who was in the wrong..."

"B-But...I get hurt when...when I do something bad..." He explained, stopping to sniffle here and there.

Cinder rocked him back and forth. "No...You were just taken by a...a VERY bad man..."

"S-So...he's bad..?" He asked, pathetically rubbing his eyes with his fists.

Cinder nodded. "Yes...he was very very bad.." She kissed his head. "You, on the other hand...are a very...VERY good boy, Harry..."

"P-Promise..?" He questioned, eating up her love like a five star buffet.

She smiled a small smile and nodded. "I promise..."

Over the next couple of days, Harry refused to budge an inch away from Cinder, Emerald, or Mercury. He had slept with Cinder every night. He didn't even have to ask for her permission, she would just come into his room and crawl under the bedsheets with him. But really...she had to break him of his Cuddle addiction. She had work to do! And if she even separated from him, he freaked out. She had to scare her inferior work mates and rivals. But still...She DID want to be there for him...She...She LOVED holding him...He was so cute and cuddly and tiny... It tore her apart! What was she to do? She was frustrated, but she had to keep it bottled up to avoid scaring her Harry... She sighed. She'd have to coax Harry to do some different things, get him out of his shell so he would be brought back up. But...what would she do? Playground? Another Playground visit would do him some good.. But was he ready to leave the base? He had taken to being indoors since the incident... Grr! Was she going to help him or not?! Maybe just a quick walk around the nearby areas. Playground was out. She decided to ask what HE wanted to do...That would help out a bit. "Harry..?" She asked, the child resting on her lap in her bedroom. A fire crackled in the corner, making the area cozy.

"Hmm?" Harry mumbled softly, his eyes closed as he savoured his caretaker's warmth.

"How about we go on a walk?" She offered him, "I hear it's nice out today..."

Harry's eyes opened, and he gave her an uneasy glance. "I-I dunno..." He said, wary. He didn't like outside...bad people were probably out there...

Cinder gave him a sad smile and ran her fingers through his hair. "If you really don't want to, you don't have too..." She promised. Harry

considered this visibly.

He let out an uneasy groan... "N-No...I don't wanna..." He said softly. Cinder nodded, then returned to cuddling him.

"Well...Some other time then, maybe?"

"M-M-Maybe...t-the outside scares me..." he muttered, clutching at her dress again. She cooed softly, and caught sight of his burn injuries...

She felt sick to her stomach upon seeing them again. It was just a bitter reminder of her own failures... She continued rocking him back and forth, bitter. She let her guard down...guard. Guards! She could have Guards outside his room! Then they wouldn't think to break in... But what if they had a transformation semblance, like Giles did, and slip through the cracks...? Frustration coursed through her veins. She was being so paranoid! She had to relax somehow. "Harry, how about we put you down fro naptime. Would you like a story?"

Harry smiled and hugged her. "Y-Yes p-please..."

Cinder carried him back to the bed and laid him down, grabbing hold of "Beauty and the Beast" It was a favourite of hers... And as she read it, Harry seemed to enjoy it. He kept his eyes forced open as he watched it, trying not to fall asleep. He was still suffering nightmares, so he was afraid of going to sleep... But if Miss Cinder was here...it wouldn't be that bad. As Miss Cinder got to the finale, he fell asleep, clutching at her like a child. Cinder sighed deeply and gave him a small smile. "Oh Harry...so funny..." she said, kissing his forehead and tucking him in with the gentleness of an angel. She gave him a gentle kiss to ease him into the land of dreams. "Not to mention Cute..." she whispered, laying down next to him and wrapping her arms around him. She buried her nose in his hair, smiling tenderly. "I love you Harry...so much..." she whispered. Harry responded by subconsciously nestling closer into her. And as a result, they fell asleep next to each other. Cuddling, like a mother and son would.

Chapter 10

Cinder strolled about the base, leaving her office from the long day of work she'd had. She was forced to make Harry stay with Emerald and Mercury, as she was busy doing paperwork, and making a surprise for Harry. Tonight was Halloween... She knew he was still afraid of going outside after the incident...But surely free candy would be enough to convince him. Of course she made a mental note to memorize where every house was, in case she needed to burn down the home of some disgusting monster who ruined children's candy by putting razor blades and poison in it... If anyone had the balls, they would soon lose them. With that thought in mind she entered Harry's bedroom where he was lying on Emerald's lap, giggling as she tickled him relentlessly. "I got you!" she laughed at him.

Cinder smiled and shook her head at the scene. Emerald, Mercury and herself were the only ones Harry was willing to trust now. It was both heartwarming and upsetting. She stepped in and made herself visible. The clinking of her heels made them look over towards her, and Harry's eyes widened and a grin came to his face. "M-Miss Cinder!"

Emerald let him down and Harry dashed towards her and hugged her legs. Cinder's smiled widened as she picked him up. "Hello there, dear." She said gently.

Harry quickly leaned close to her, soaking in the body heat she sent off. "Mercury and Emerald and I read books, and played games, and Mercury said you had a surprise for me!" He babbled happily.

Cinder smirked and ruffled his hair. "Ah, did he? Well I certainly hope he didn't spoil anything."

"Uh uh! He just said you made me something." He replied. Cinder nodded, then pulled a bag out from behind her back.

"Harry, tonight is Halloween. Do you know what that is?"

Harry blinked. "Um...Dudley always had a lot of candy on Halloween. I don't know where it came from..."

"Well..." Cinder began, sitting down in her rocking chair. "Halloween is when you put on a costume and go out into the neighbourhoods, asking people at the door for candy. Then they give it to you."

Harry stared at her. "They just...LET you have it?"

"Yes, it's a perfect time for children."

Harry didn't look all that convinced. "But...But I don't like outside..." He tried to say.

Cinder sighed deeply. "Please, Harry...Just do it...For me?" Harry froze up for a moment...but he nodded. He was gonna go...if it meant Cinder was happy. Cinder grinned. "Perfect! Now...try this on." She said, grabbing the costume out of the bag. It was a small Grimm outfit, a Beawolf.

Harry looked at the costume with wide eyes and a tilted head. "Heeey, you said he'd wear the panda costume I got him at the store!" Emerald whined.

Cinder shook her head. "I spent all week on this. If you want someone to wear it, wear it yourself." She said, changing Harry's clothes to get him all set up.

"It won't fit me..." Emerald muttered. She was feeling very cross.

Cinder smirked knowingly and helped Harry through his last sleeve. Soon he was all dressed. Where the Beawolf's mouth was, was Harry's face. She stood and left Harry on the floor. He looked all over the costume while Cinder pulled out her Scroll. Mercury and Emerald stood behind her and watched, as Cinder said,

"Harry..."

"Huh?" he looked up at her.

"Roar." she said. The boy didn't get her request at first, but then raised up his hands, and said,

"Rawr!"

"AAAAAAAGH! STOP, MY HEART CAN'T TAKE IT!" Emerald said dramatically, clutching at her chest and falling on her back. "Aaaand now I'm dead."

Harry blushed and covered his eyes, and Cinder moved forward and picked him up. "You look great dear. Are you ready to go out and trick or treat? I bet you'll be a big hit." Harry let out a squeak in response. Cinder just laughed. "I'll take that as a yes, then?" She looked towards Emerald and Mercury. "Are you two coming?"

Emerald nodded, and Mercury shrugged, "Sure I guess."

"See, Harry? Emerald and Mercury will be there too. There's nothing to be scared of."

Harry nodded, and hugged closer to her, wrapping his arms around her neck. Cinder rubbed his back and left the base, hopping into a "Borrowed" car and zooming off into the sunset. The sky was cloudy and all the leaves were on the ground. Harry was peeking out the window timidly. It was dark out. He didn't like it dark. But he felt a gentle squeeze from Cinder and he relaxed. He like Miss Cinder...she was so warm... She had fire powers. Is that why she was warm and toasty? Whatever the reason, he loved it. The car stopped suddenly. "Okay kiddies! Check it, rich neighbourhoods!" Mercury laughed.

Harry blinked. "Huh?" Emerald chuckled.

"That means rich snobs'll give you more candy."

"Oh." Harry replied. Cinder pulled him out of the car and set him on the sidewalk, handing him s bag.

"Now...lets go." The raven-haired woman held his hand tightly and led him off. He looked around timidly. It was dark, and spooky, and there were so many people. Each one was in a costume...some of the costumes were spooky...he didn't like this. Not one bit. However, he felt a reassuring squeeze on his hand. Blinking, he looked up at Cinder. She smiled back at him. "Again, you have all three of us here to watch you. It'll be okay." She assured. Harry smiled and nodded.

"Okay, Miss Cinder..." He spoke softly. Cinder smiled brightly.

Cinder lead him up to his first house, and rung the doorbell. She knelt down next to him, "When they answer, say trick or treat."

Harry nodded and a kind looking woman answered the door. "Oh! Uh...T-Trick or Treat..." He squeaked, flinching slightly.

"Aww, aren't you cute!" The woman cooed, holding out a handful of candy shed taken from a bowl. Harry looked at it strangely until Cinder moved his arms so he was holding his bag open. The candy was poured in and the woman went back inside.

Harry smiled slightly. The nice lady gave him candy! Just like Miss Cinder got for him sometimes! "Miss Cinder look! I got candy!" He exclaimed happily as Cinder lead him off of the porch with a bemused smile.

"It seems you did. Let's collect more then, yes?"

Harry nodded eagerly. "Yeah! I like candy! It's yummy!"

Cinder nodded, smirked and took him to the next house, where Harry was rewarded with a heap of candy. He began to get happier and happier, bouncing up and down as he was paraded around. Cinder laughed each time as he grew happier and happier. It was good to see he was finally okay with being outside. It appeared he

was forgetting all about the suffering he had gone through. SUCH a relief... After hours of walking around, Harry had a full bag of candy, and it was half an hour past Harry's bedtime. The boy was dragging behind as he clung to Cinder's hand. Cinder laughed at his antics. "Looks like someone is tired." She said mirthfully. Harry smiled brightly at her and nodded.

"It's past my bedtime! ...D-Do I get to eat the candy?" he asked hopefully. Cinder nodded, "Of course." and Harry reached into his bag and took out some chocolate.

"Buut...Let me check it first. I want to make sure it's safe..."

"H-Huh? Why wouldn't it be..?" Harry asked, suddenly worried. Cinder groaned.

"Some people...do bad things to the candy."

Harry's eyes widened. "But why? Are they just mean?"

"yes. Very mean." Cinder replied. Harry nodded and they entered the car. Harry sat on her lap happily, moving close. Cinder patted his head gently. Then she moved to study the candy. She was very thorough with each piece...and they all checked out, thankfully. No sign of anything bad. She handed the bag back to Harry and watched him dig into his candy with glee on his face. He was so happy! He only had three pieces, surprisingly. When asked about it, he said he wanted to savour it. That was a mature decision on his part. Cinder ruffled his hair with a smile on her face. "Good for you Harry. Now you won't be bouncing off the wall on candy." Harry giggled in response and snuggled closer to her. She smirked and stared forward. He needed to go to bed. "When we get home, i'll go ahead and read you your story. Then we'll go to sleep, okay?" Cinder told him. Harry smiled tiredly and clutched at her dress. She LOVED it when he clutched at her dress. It showed how close they were. She wrapped her arms around him again and hummed. Her singing voice was pretty good, and Harry liked it. So she continued humming. Eventually, the humming was so soothing it put him to

sleep. He clutched tightly to his caregiver, dreaming happily. This was the best... Cinder's eyes widened and she let out the smallest sound of happiness. She held him closer, and kissed his head. "My little Harry..."